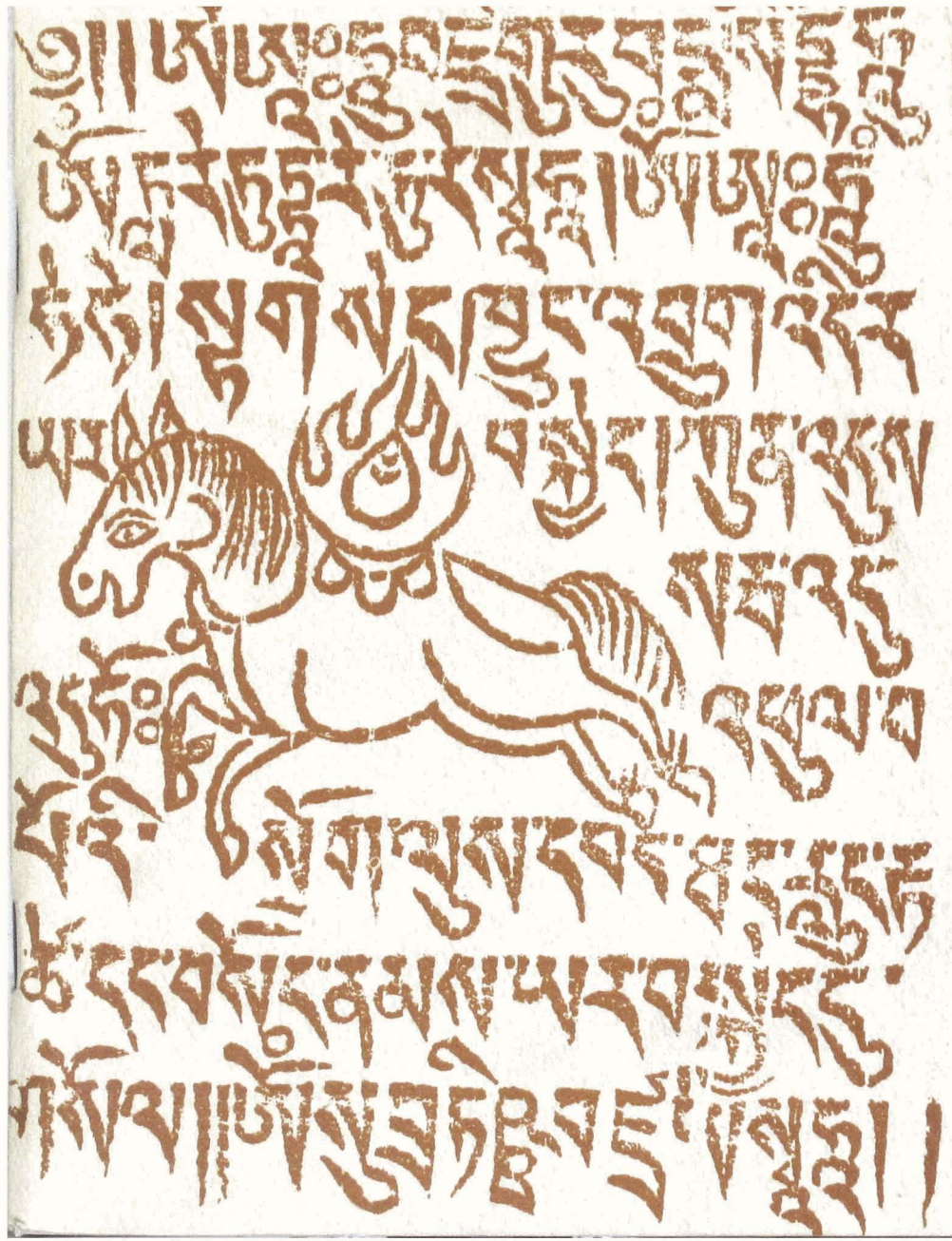

TIBETAN ART

TIBETAN LIFE AND CULTURE

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Tibet and the Tibetans

In 1959 Tibet disappeared into the vast landmass of China, and Tibetan culture as it was shaped by Buddhism for thirteen hundred years came to an end. The following notes are descriptive of this unique and remarkable culture which survived almost intact during a period of tremendous change in the rest of the world. It survived because its people were dedicated to its protection and preservation, and because they lived high above and apart from the changing world, relatively isolated from the rest of Asia, and almost completely isolated from the West.

Tibet the country, ruled until 1950 by the god king known as the Dalai Lama, is part of a much larger area which is Tibetan from a geological, ethnological, linguistic, and religious viewpoint, although politically speaking, this larger Tibet includes much of western China, and Ladakh in Kashmir. In the present publication, the term "Tibet" refers to this vast region, about one-fourth as large as the United States, with a Tibetan population of between four and eight million.

It is difficult for the imagination to form a just concept of this wild rugged terrain with its vast silent emptiness — its desolate wind-swept northern uplands — its soaring ranges and tremendous gorges — and its enchanted valleys where the bulk of the population dwells.

Although Tibet stretches between India and China, its people are like neither the Indians nor the Chinese. A mixture of races, in part Mongolian and in part Caucasian, they often resemble American Indians. Generally tall, broad, and well proportioned, with fine gentle faces and deep confident voices, they are light hearted and merry and also deeply devotional — perhaps the most religious people the world has ever known.

There is some farming in the lower valleys, but Tibet is essentially a land of nomads and monks. The nomads, whose wild free life is the envy of the farmers, roam the higher valleys with their flocks of sheep and goats and herds of yak, living in black yak hair tents at altitudes ranging from eleven to fifteen thousand feet above sea level. The sedentary peoples and the monks live in houses and monasteries of earth, sundried brick or stone, with walls gently sloping inwards, echoing the rhythms of their mountainous land.

The monasteries, occupying sites of unrivaled beauty and magnificence, are the largest communities, and the centers of education and culture. From every family one or more sons leave home at the age of eight or nine to follow the path of celibacy and contemplation. Few visitors have failed to envy the Tibetan monks their opportunity to strive for spiritual perfection in so inspiring an environment.

In the seventh century, when Buddhism was introduced, the Tibetans were a loosely organized group of warring tribes, without culture of their own. Under an aggressive king named Srong-btsan sgam-po, they formed a military power which was dreaded in Asia. After invading Nepal and China, this Tibetan king demanded and received in marriage a Nepalese and a Chinese princess. Both were devout Buddhists. Thus Buddhism was introduced simultaneously from China and from Nepal, the small Hindu-Buddhist kingdom between Tibet and India, on whose southern border the Buddha was born.

With Buddhism came civilization, and the double marriage is symbolic of the two major influences which molded the culture of Tibet. From India came the religious teaching, the basic elements in the religious arts, and the alphabet. The Tibetans are indebted to China chiefly for worldly knowledge such as agriculture, weaving, tea drinking, paper making, and woodblock printing.

Under the influence of Buddhism, Tibet changed within a few centuries from a nation of warriors to a deeply religious and peace-loving nation with little or no interest in the outside world. Religion pervades every aspect of life and the only progress desired is progress along the spiritual

path. The goal of the ordinary Tibetan is rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amitabha Buddha. The goal of the advanced monk is Nirvāna.

The status of woman is remarkably high in Tibet. Women have governed parts of the country, they are consulted by their husbands in matters of business and trade, and woman is usually the authority in the home.

Polyandry has been adopted as a means of keeping the family estate intact, and in such cases the woman is married to all the brothers in a family, her children acknowledging the oldest brother as father. This practice and the monastic system have tended to keep the population from increasing, with the result that living conditions are better than in most Asiatic lands. There is enough for all, and if anyone lacks the necessities of life, the neighboring monastery is ready to lend a helping hand, so that, despite the hardships of life in the highlands, there is an underlying sense of security which is based upon the actualities as well as the ultimate realities.

Language

The Tibetan spoken language is usually considered to belong to the southeastern Asiatic language group. The written language is derived from the Sanskrit. It employs an alphabet with thirty consonants and five vowels, and is thus very different from the ideographic scripts of China and Mongolia. It reads from the left to right in horizontal lines as do modern European languages.

The language was entirely oral until the seventh century when the celebrated Tibetan king, Srong-btsan sgam-po, sent Thon-mi Sambhota to India to study Indian writing and bring back the Buddhist scriptures. To this Tibetan scholar is attributed the invention of the Tibetan alphabet which was derived from the Devanāgarī then used in Kashmir. Tibetan history relates that King Srong-btsan sgam-po retired into seclusion for four years to learn reading and writing, sending to China for paper and ink.

Written Tibetan abounds in consonants, many of which are now mute in the dialect of Lhasa and the sedentary Tibetan peoples generally, although they are sounded in varying degree in the speech of the nomadic tribes. In the Lhasa dialect, different tones are used to distinguish words of the same sound that were once distinguished by the consonantal endings and prefixes. Although the spoken language varies in different localities, the written language is everywhere the same.

Costume

The national garment, worn by all pastoral peoples, and in a modified form by most sedentary Tibetans, is the *chuba,* the Tibetan version of the *caftan* or open cloak which is common throughout Asia. The usual nomad *chuba* is of sheepskin with the wool inside. The finest men's *chubas* are of a woolen material called *truk,* woven near Lhasa from sheep's wool and dyed a deep plum color.

The *chuba* is bound many times around the waist with an extremely long belt or sash which converts the upper portion of the garment into a receptacle for the objects which will be needed during the day. What does not go inside is hung from or thrust through the belt, or hung around the neck or over the shoulder. The ordinary Tibetan feels unhappy and incomplete without his charm box, food bowl, knife or eating set, and flint and tinder pouch. To these the nomad adds his sword, and the monk his ritualistic water flask, pen case and ink container. The nomad wears his *chuba* deeply bloused so that it falls no lower than the knees. The sedentary Tibetans are likely to wear the *chuba* ankle length and to adopt more conservative lines generally. The women or sedentary communities wear gaily striped aprons over *chubas* or other garments.

At full length, the *chuba's* sleeves are warm but cumbersome. They extend about fourteen inches beyond the finger tips! Both arms are often withdrawn from the sleeves, which are then tied around the waist, exposing a nude torso above an odd looking skirt, or the right arm may be withdrawn only, permitting the right sleeve to trail at the rear, falling to the ankle. This is done especially during the short summers and at midday when even in high cold regions the sun is often very hot.

The monks wear, instead of the *chuba,* voluminous woolen garments of garnet red, basically patterned after the garments of the Indian Buddhist monks, but adapted to the requirements of a cold climate. Monks of the Gelugpa order, the reformed or established church of Tibet, wear yellow hats which distinguish them from monks of the earlier unreformed orders who wear red hats. All Tibetans wear heavy boots which come to just below the knees where they are bound by a long woven strap. The laymen's boots combine leather and brightly patterned wool with the happiest effects.

Textiles

Silk culture, although introduced from China, was never successful in high Tibet. The gorgeous silks used with such striking effect in religious hangings and ceremonial garments are predominantly Chinese, and, rather rarely, Indian. Virtually all the native fabrics are woven on simple hand looms from sheep or goat wool. Yak hair is too coarse and wiry for clothing but the nomads weave it into cloth for their black tents. A cloth called *truk, pulo* or *puru,* woven by the sedentary peoples from sheep wool is famous in China and Mongolia. The Tibetans claim that the best grades of *truk* are absolutely waterproof and will outwear any imported fabric. Their superior qualities are attributed to the fact that the wool is combed from the sheep at shedding time, not sheared, so there are no stubby ends to the fibers. Also, the natural oils are not washed out, and the weaving is extraordinarily close and firm. *Truk* is used undyed, or dyed a plain color, or brightly striped, or decorated with crosses which are sometimes printed and sometimes tie-dyed. Indigo, grown in the Himalayan countries, supplies most of the blues. The golden yellows are often obtained from rhubarb root. A native grass grown near Lhasa is used for most of the reds. Indigo mixed with walnut hulls produces the dark plum color which is popular for men's cloaks (*chubas*).

Jewelry

Tibetan men as well as women delight in wearing ornaments set with turquoise and coral. Turquoises are native to Tibet, but the finest stones have been imported from Persia. The Tibetans lavish upon fine turquoise the love and appreciation which the Chinese reserve for jade. Both corals and turquoises are believed to have curative and health-giving properties which are described in Tibetan medical works. Genuine corals are expensive, however, and artificial stones are commonly used.

The metals employed are usually low grade silver or gold alloy. The stones are set with the aid of melted wax, a method which inevitably results in many lost stones and empty settings.

Women wear a pair of earrings, often of tremendous proportions, and men wear a single hoop or pendant in the left ear, and often a rough turquoise in the right ear.

The women's headdresses vary with each tribe and are the most spectacular changes to be observed as one travels from one district to another. The national mode of hairdressing requires many fine plaits — ideally there should be the sacred Buddhist number one hundred and eight. Among some tribes the plaits fall like a mantle from the crown to the waist, making the wearers look like medieval princesses. On the head or extending down the back, sometimes from head to foot, is worn a traditional arrangement of jewels, beads, and silver bosses or plates. This headdress or back plate is basically the same for all women within each tribe, although married women usually wear a more elaborate arrangement. The charm box (*ga'u*) filled with prayers and sacred objects which protect the wearer from evil, is often the handsomest object worn. Charm boxes are worn as lockets, especially among the women. Travellers wear large shrine-shaped boxes on a strap which goes over one shoulder and under the other arm. These are placed on the household altars when not being worn. Even jewelry is usually adorned with emblems of religious significance.

Food and Food Utensils

The foods which have contributed to the extraordinary endurance and stamina of the Tibetan people are a matter of great interest. One is astonished to learn that the national "staff of life" is tea with butter added. This tea is imported from western China, where it is especially prepared for the Tibetan market, usually in the form of compressed bricks. The leaves and twigs are sun-dried and fermented for a few days, then steamed, mixed with a little rice water, dropped into molds and pressed into bricks. Chinese porters carry tremendous loads of tea on their backs to Tatsienlu (now Kang-ting), the gateway to Tibet, where it is sold to the Tibetans who carry it into the interior by yak or by mule caravan.

To make the stimulating drink, the Tibetans break a chunk off the brick and boil it in water to which a little soda is usually added, pour it through a bamboo strainer, throw in some salt, and then mix it in a small wooden churn, adding as much butter as can be afforded. The tea is then ready for consumption, a rather bitter, salty and greasy concoction to which the drinker often adds another chunk of butter from the ever-handy wooden butter box, and sometimes a little parched barley flour or *tsamba*. The average person drinks each day from fifty to eighty cupfuls of this brew and eats very little other food. With the exception of tea, which he can not do without, and sugar which is a great luxury, the foods of the Tibetan are entirely home grown.

Barley is the principal grain product since it is hardy and will flourish at high altitudes. It is parched and ground, and called *tsamba*. The sedentary Tibetans eat *tsamba* and relatively little meat. The nomadic Tibetans eat meat and cheese and relatively little *tsamba*. The agricultural Tibetans of the lower valleys may grow potatoes, peas, wheat, turnips, apricots and the like, but the only vegetable food usually available to the pastoral tribes is the root of *potentilla anserina* which grows abundantly, at least in eastern Tibet.

A beer called *chang* is also brewed from barley. This is second in popularity to butter tea.

Although Buddhism forbids it, the eating of meat seems to be a requirement in so cold and rigorous

an environment, and mutton and yak meat are eaten when obtainable. Hunting is, however, prohibited in Tibet proper.

Food bowls, butter boxes and tea pots are expressive of the good taste with which the native craftsman fashions articles of everyday use. The bowls and butter containers are usually turned from beautifully marked knots and burls. The Tibetan has great appreciation of natural woods, which are something of a rarity since large areas of Tibet are above the tree line. A fine wooden tea bowl brings a high price and is a treasured possession. Often it is given a silver lining. Each person carries in the pouch of his gown a bowl which he alone uses and then carefully licks clean. Incidentally, this practice, and the custom of saluting those of high station by thrusting out the tongue as far as it will go, has resulted in extraordinarily long and muscular tongues among Tibetan people.

Tea pots are made either of metal or brown earthenware. They are almost invariably well proportioned. The copper, brass or silver pots often have handles, spouts and lids of contrasting metals cast or beaten in traditional forms suggesting the lifegiving waters which the pots hold. To the student they are also expressive of the two major influences, Indian and Chinese, which molded Tibetan culture. The spout issues from the mouth of a *makara,* the mythological Indian sea monster with elephant-like trunk which plays a prominent part in Tibetan ritualistic art. The handle takes the form of the Chinese dragon. The decoration of the lid often represents either conventionalized clouds or the sacred lotus which grows from the mud and water, and emerges unsullied and divinely pure. In a land where few have actually seen the lotus plant or its blossoms, the sacred flower of Buddhism is seldom naturalistically represented.

Tea is served in the home from a small folding table of carved and painted wood, the only article of furniture in the Tibetan household. The people sit crosslegged on rugs. On the table the teapot stands beside the wooden butter box, and the guest of high station is offered a charming jade, silver or gold tea cup with a pagoda-like cover and an elevated lotiform saucer.

People usually carry, in addition to the food bowl, a small knife in a sheath, or, in districts where

Chinese influence has penetrated, an eating set consisting of knife and chopsticks, which hangs from the belt and is often attractively decorated with contrasting bands of yak or other horn inlaid with copper, brass and silver wires. The knife is used for removing every particle of boiled mutton from the bone. If the bone contains marrow, it is always cracked. It is a Tibetan saying that one may judge the way a man will manage important business by seeing him pick a bone. When the meal is over, the greasy hands are commonly wiped over the face, or over clothes, or boots, to make them more weatherproof.

The Religion

The Tibetan faith, often called Lamaism after its higher clergy, is essentially Tantric Buddhism, the final phase of Indian Buddhism, which evolved in the northeastern provinces of Bihar and Bengal between the seventh and eleventh centuries, and was almost simultaneously transplanted to the Snowy Land.[1]

Tantric Buddhism was an offshoot of Mahayana, the theistic, devotional form of Buddhism which spread to China, Korea, and Japan between the second and sixth centuries of our era. It differs in that a large part of its practice is based upon esoteric teachings set forth in the revelatory Sanskrit texts called Tantras.

In the twelfth century Moslem invasions wiped out the last vestiges of Buddhism from India, the land of its origin. Although cut off from the mother tradition, Tantric Buddhism continued to flourish in Tibet where the people faithfully preserved and cherished the holy teachings which had come to them from across the mountain barriers. In the sixteenth century the religion spread to Mongolia. At this writing, it has been suppressed in Tibet, but is still practiced in Outer Mongolia and the Himalayan regions, notably northern Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. A vital outpost of the church exists among the Kalmuck Mongols who have recently found sanctuary in the United States and settled in New Jersey and Philadelphia. A closely related form of Tantric Buddhism survives in the Shingon (True Word) Sect of Japan.

With the tolerance and adaptability which has always characterized the religion, Tantric Buddhism admitted into its already extensive pantheon many of the indigenous spirits belonging to the native Tibetan religion called Bön. The eighth century Indian teacher Padma Sambhava, founder of Lamaism, is said to have subdued by his magic powers many Bön demons which had been causing disasters and epidemics, making them defenders of the religion and the monasteries. The number of Bön deities in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon has steadily increased up to the present

1. A poetic name which the Tibetans have given to their country.

day, as other mischievous spirits have been conquered and added to the immense group of deities of Indian as well as Tibetan origin known as Dharmapala or Protectors of the Law.[2] In accordance with the duties they have to fulfill, the Dharmapala are usually depicted in ferocious aspect, brandishing weapons and treading upon the enemies of the Doctrine.

Little is known of Bön before the introduction of Buddhism. It is safe to assume that it was an animistic faith, worshipping the spirits of man and nature especially in their awesome and terrifying aspects. Certain very impressive Bön rituals such as the masses for the dead and the masked dance dramas were adapted to Buddhist concepts and symbology and incorporated into Buddhist worship. The wooden mold with its animated carvings for making sacrificial effigies is one evidence of the vitality of Bön rites in the Buddhist church. Its lively figures offer a refreshing contrast to the rigidity of the transplanted Indian art. *See plate 10.*

It is often stated that the older unreformed Red Hat Lamaist sects include more Bön elements than the Gelugpa or Yellow Hat sect which was founded by the great Tibetan leader, Tsong-kha-pa, in the fifteenth century and has since become the established church with the Dalai Lama at its head. This is firmly denied by the Tibetan authority Lama Govinda who observes that it was the Gelugpa who revived the State Oracles, one of the most influential Bön institutions. The deities who are invoked by the oracle priests are exclusively Bön, as are all the deities believed to speak through Tibetan mediums.[3]

The Bön religion, in its turn, took over Buddhist ideals and symbols on a vast scale, and according to Lama Govinda, rules of celibacy and monastic discipline are stricter in most Bön than in most Buddhist monasteries, with the possible exception of the Gelugpa.

While rejecting the ritualistic fetters of Hinduism, Buddhism was from the beginning deeply rooted in this native faith of India. Buddhism holds with Hinduism that the source of all error and suffering is the human belief in the reality of the material world, which is no more than an illusion of the senses,

2. See R. deNebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet,* The Hague, The Netherlands, 1956, pp. 3-5.

3. See W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* London, 1957, pp. lvi-lvii.

a concept with which Western science now appears to be in substantial agreement. The Universal Mind which pervades all beings and all things is the only Reality and the source as well as the goal of all existence. As long as man believes in the reality of this changing world, says Buddhism, he is subject to desire which is the cause of suffering, since it leads to *karma* and reincarnation. *Karma* means action, and refers to the force generated by thought, words and deeds, influencing conditions in the world and in each man's life by inexorable cause and effect — the present being always influenced by the past, and the future being influenced by the present and the past. All beings are reborn endless times and in countless forms, until *karma* ceases to operate. Deliverance comes only when ignorance of the true nature of life is overcome and desire is transcended (not, as is so often stated, suppressed). *Karma* is then also gradually transcended, and the individual consciousness is free to reintegrate with Reality. Buddhism usually calls this cosmic consciousness Nirvāna. Tibetan Buddhism calls it the Void.

The term Buddha, meaning Enlightened One, literally "a man who has waked up", is applied to one who has attained Nirvāna. The founder of Buddhism, Prince Siddhārtha, became the Buddha as he sat in meditation under the Bodhi Tree during the sixth century before Christ, when he was about thirty-five years old. He is known as Gautama (his family name) or Śākyamuni, "sage of Śākya." He was born to a life of ease, and his father had tried to keep from him all knowledge of suffering. His awareness of this universal human problem was the result of four famous meetings — with a poor man, a sick man, a corpse and a holy man. Deeply distressed by the first three encounters, and impressed by the serenity of the holy man, he at length left his wife, his child and his future kingdom, to seek spiritual wisdom. His Enlightenment was the climax of six years of earnest searching. He remained on earth for forty-five years to show men the way to liberation, and then ended his final reincarnation.

In Tibetan Buddhist art, the various Buddhas are characteristically shown in Indian monk's robes, seated in the cross-legged yogic position of meditation. Śākyamuni Buddha may usually be identified by his characteristic pose with right arm and hand pendant, palm turned inward, forming the gest-

ure called earth-touching or witnessing (bhūmispaŕsa mudrā), referring to the episode during his long meditation under the Bodhi Tree, when he called upon the earth as witness that he had resisted the temptations sent by Mārā, demon of desire. His left hand rests in his lap, sometimes holding an alms bowl. His color is golden.

Of the thirty-two divine signs on the body of a Buddha the artist usually shows three: the uṣnīṣa, a protuberance on the head symbolizing wisdom; the urnā, a circle in the center of the forehead symbolizing spiritual insight; the elongated ear lobes with large perforations symbolizing world renunciation. Śākyamuni as a young prince wore heavy earrings which caused the fashionable deformation still seen among some older persons in the south of India. As a Buddha he discarded these worldly possessions.

The ideal figure of early Buddhism was the Arhat — the monk who attained Nirvāna by his own unaidded efforts. At the beginning of the Christian era, Mahāyāna Buddhism arose, proclaiming as its ideal the Bodhisattva or striver for Buddhahood, who, out of his great compassion for all creatures, delays his entrance into Nirvāna in order to aid all suffering creatures. The great Bodhisattvas, who have attained near-perfection, strive unceasingly for the salvation of mankind, either returning to the world in human form or working from invisible planes. Mahāyāna opened the way for the salvation of the masses, who could be helped by invoking the great Bodhisattvas. As Mahāyāna developed, it drew closer to Hinduism and evolved a system of divinities including Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and lesser gods who differed little except in name from the Hindu gods.

Tibetan Buddhist art usually represents Bodhisattvas as Indian princes or princesses, wearing flowing scarves and jewelry such as the Bodhisattva who later became Śākyamuni Buddha wore when he was a young prince, and symbolizing the self-imposed link of these compassionate beings with the material world.

The adherents of Mahāyāna (the greater vehicle) gave to the older teaching the rather belittling name of Hinayāna (the lesser vehicle). Mahāyāna or Northern Buddhism spread to China, Korea and Japan before it reached Tibet in the seventh century. Hinayāna or Theravāda — the name by which its ad-

herents prefer to be known — is the religion of Ceylon, Burma and southeastern Asia.

Tantric Buddhism, also called Vajrayāna, "the vajra (diamond) vehicle," was a development of Mahāyāna. Its adherents consider it to be the third vehicle, divinely revealed as a swift road to Enlightment for the most advanced souls. Vajrayāna gathered together the primordial magical and folk traditions of India, and also the deeply mystical Yogic traditions, and united them with Mahāyāna philosophic principles. The Tantras or treatises which set forth these teachings are an expression of Indian gnosis. Gnosticism arose in India later than in Iran and the West.

Vajrayāna holds that what one professes to believe is less important than what one actually experiences, and offers practical methods for translating intellectual knowledge into an inner psychological drama, leading to the awakening of the spiritual forces hidden within the individual. The purpose of Vajrayāna is identical with that of all other forms of Buddhism — the attainment of perfect wisdom and the reintegration of the individual with the cosmos.

The lamas accept the early Buddhist canon as the exoteric teachings of Gautama Buddha, asserting that the Tantras represent his esoteric teachings which have always been handed down by word of mouth.

According to Vajrayāna, cosmic expansion takes place through the multiplication of the one Being or Supreme Buddha into fundamental forces or emanations through which it becomes realized. Being universal, these forces are within the individual and therefore realization is possible. They are personified as gods.

The immense and diversified pantheon is expressive of this doctrine of multiplicity, as are the multiple heads and limbs characteristic of some divinities. These also symbolize the infinitude of the god's powers, the heads suggesting unlimited wisdom and the arms illimitable compassion and ability to succor the faithful.

The good forces, in order to conquer the forces of evil, must take on the forms of the latter, and plunge into their world. Thus most gods appear in demonic as well as beneficent form. The mystic consciously identifies himself with these gods during a certain stage in his meditations in order to

hasten the annihilation of the human qualities which constitute the personal ego, a necessary step to his full realization of the wholeness of Being.

The two aspects, beneficent and demonic, are also symbolic of the philosophic concept of unity in duality, the inseparable cooperation of the pairs of opposites. This is a central principle of the religion and the deepest meaning of much of its complex symbolism. Thus, the gods appear in female as well as male forms, and sometimes the two are depicted in close embrace, the female partner representing Wisdom and the male representing Compassion, the Method by which Wisdom is attained. The synthesis of these two divine forces is Enlightenment.

Tantric Buddhism makes use of diverse forms of meditation and contemplation and complex rituals. The rituals include three basic elements: the *vajra* or thunderbolt which is a ritualistic scepter and spiritual weapon, symbolizing the pure and perfect Buddha consciousness which has dominion over the world; *mantras* or sacred Sanskrit syllables expressive of cardinal truths of the faith, which are believed to have a mighty inherent power when uttered or written in the right spirit; and *mudras* or mystic gestures of the hands which are used in the rituals to seal the *mantras* and make them effective.

In the services, the intoning of the *mantras* is like the surge of a great ocean of primordial sound. Simultaneously with the chanting of the *mantras,* while holding in his right hand the *vajra,* and in his left hand its feminine counterpart, the bell, the lama forms with lightning rapidity the various *mudras.* Several hundred are used in the rituals. Relatively few are seen in the images of the gods, denoting their nature and activities.

Mantras are memorized and repeated by the ordinary Tibetan in order to acquire merit. The most popular *mantra,* OM MANI PADME HUM, the "jewel in the lotus" formula, is an invocation to Chenrezi, the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, who is believed to be incarnate in the Dalai Lama. It is asserted that this *mantra,* when repeated with sincere faith and a thankful heart, has the power to annul *karma* and end the cycle of rebirth. It is equally effective when written. Thus it is commonly carved on stones which are made into great piles, printed on flags which flap in the wind, and inscribed on the long rolls of paper which rotate in the prayer wheels. These Tibetan inventions

are spun by hand or by wind or water power. The Tibetan believes that the power of the *mantras* may be activated and diffused by all the forces of nature.

A peculiarity of Tibetan Buddhism is the belief in *trülkus,* reincarnations of emanations of particular gods or holy men, known to the West as "Living Buddhas." In the seventeenth century it was revealed to the Dalai Lama that he was an incarnation of Chenrezi (Avalokitesvara), long venerated as the guardian of Tibet, and that his spiritual teacher, the Grand Lama of Tashi-lhunpo monastery, was an incarnation of Amitābha Buddha, Chenrezi's spiritual father, one of the five celestial Buddhas of Meditation. Thus the Dalai Lama's teacher became the Panchen Lama, the second great leader of Tibet, whose power is purely spiritual. The Dalai Lama himself should wield both spiritual and temporal power. Before long, every monastery was presided over by a *trülku,* who was usually a reincarnation of some historical figure or of the last abbot of the monastery. When a *trülku* dies, an infant is sought in whom his spirit lives again. The holy child is identified, often after prolonged searching, by a series of tests. For instance, he must be able to identify from a miscellaneous group of articles, those which he owned in his previous incarnation. When his authenticity is considered to have been proven, the child, seldom more than four years old, is taken from his parents and trained for his solemn office.

The Religious Arts

As the religion was received from Bihar and Bengal between the seventh and eleventh centuries, so the Buddhist art which flourished in these northeastern Indian provinces during the Pāla dynasty (750-1060 A.D.) was transmitted to the Snowy Land. Tibetan religious arts are essentially a prolongation of this Pāla art, but subject to influences from Nepal and China, Kashmir and Central Asia. The influences from Kashmir and Central Asia are noticeable only in early examples which are rare in Museum collections. Influences from Nepal remain constant during all periods. Influences from China vary with political trends, and are most prominent during the eighteenth century.

The skilled Nepalese craftsmen of the artistic Newari tribes, thoroughly versed in Indian traditions, travelled from monastery to monastery, making the objects that were needed, especially the metal images for which they were famous even in China. They were the teachers of the Tibetans.

Chinese influences are limited to certain techniques such as the interesting appliquéd needlework, some of the less basic religious symbols, and the more decorative and worldly elements seen especially in the paintings.

Lamaist arts are anonymous and very rarely dated. They are subjected to rigid canons. Content and style have changed little through the centuries. Local variations have been slight, and in any case most pieces have reached up without indication of provenence. Thus Tibetan art is difficult to date or to assign to particular schools. Most examples date from the eighteenth century and later. It is usually the rare earlier works, dating from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, which are of a high order from the viewpoint of aesthetic and spiritual content. Later examples, with few exceptions, tend to be stereotyped and mechanical. Their interest lies largely in the traditions of symbolism and craftsmanship which they preserve, traditions of art in the service of Deity such as the Western world has not seen since the Middle Ages.

Books

The art of writing, which has already been briefly considered, is the most basic of the religious arts. It evolved in order that the scriptures might be translated into Tibetan, and has always been used primarily for transmitting the sacred teachings.

The Tibetan book takes its format from the Indian Buddhist books which were written on strips of birch bark in Kashmir and on strips of palm leaf in Nepal, Bengal, and other parts of India. The leaves of the Indian books were placed between wooden covers and strung together with cords passing through the perforations in the leaves.

The Tibetan books are hand lettered or block printed on the tough native paper which is made by spreading a thin layer of vegetable pulp upon a rack and letting it dry. The leaves are not strung together. They are simply stacked like a pack of cards, wrapped in a large square of cloth, placed between wooden slabs, and bound with a leather strap.

Many of the earlier editions of the scriptures are beautifully lettered in gold and silver ink on paper which has been given a smooth black surface by rubbing with Chinese ink. The title pages are delicately illumined with sacred emblems and the figures of saints and divinities. The upper wooden cover, especially of the popular abridged volume of the Prajñā-pāramitā (Transcendental Wisdom), is often richly carved.

The Tibetan Buddhist scriptures are composed of two great collections, the Kanjur (Bka'-gyur) or canon, in 100 to 108 volumes and the Tanjur, or commentaries in 209 to 225 volumes.

Kanjur means "The Word Translated." It consists of sermons and teachings attributed to the Buddha. Śākyamuni of course wrote nothing himself. His words were transmitted orally through the recital of monks until about 400 years after his death, when they were written in canonical form in Pali, Sanskrit and other Indian languages. The Kanjur is based on the Sanskrit and to some extent on the subsequent Chinese version of this Buddhist canon. It also includes the Tantras, treatises on esoteric doctrines and practices believed to represent the secret teachings of Śākyamuni.

The volumes of the Tanjur or "Translated Explanations" embrace such subjects as grammar, poetry, logic, rhetoric, law, medicine, painting, astrology, divination, and the lives of the saints, all of which are the handmaids of religion.

The translations were made between the seventh and thirteenth centuries by learned Tibetan monks working with Indian or Chinese scholars. Any deviation from the original texts was considered a sacrilege, and the faithful accuracy of the Tibetan translations endows them with great value at the present day. So literal are they that the original Sanskrit texts, many of which have been lost, can be reconstructed almost mechanically by retranslating each syllabic equivalent. Thus the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures are a primary authentic source for the study of Buddhism.

No complete translation of the Kanjur or Tanjur exists in any Occidental language, and the bulk of the collection is still unstudied by Western scholars.

There is great respect for the printed word in Tibet, and the books which contain the Word of Buddha are among the most sacred ritual objects. There should be at least one on every altar; in the temples and domestic chapels, it is customary to place the volumes of the Kanjur on partitioned shelves which extend from floor to ceiling at each side of the altar.

The abundant indigenous literature consists largely of metaphysical treatises, sacred poetry, histories, and the biographies of saints and other historical personages.

Woodblock Printing

The art of woodblock printing arose in China under the stimulus of Buddhism and the Buddhist urge to reduplicate sacred words and pictures. It was known at least as early as the eighth century and may have been introduced to Tibet soon thereafter. The Far East, unlike Europe, reckons the invention of printing from the beginning of woodblock printing, and has generally considered moveable type a rather unimportant later development. Woodblock printing was the invention that transformed Asiatic culture by quantity production, and in quality as well as quantity it has always been pre-eminent in the Far East. All Tibetan printing is done by means of hand carved woodblocks. Moveable type was known in China in the eleventh century, but there is no record of its ever having been used in Tibet.

Through the centuries the Tibetan monks have employed the art solely for the purposes which brought it into being — the multiplying of religious texts and images. The millions of prayer flags which flap in the winds are block printed. Books and the countless rolls of prayers and sacred texts in images, *chortens,* and prayer wheels are either block printed or hand lettered.

The process of carving a woodblock is as follows: The block is first cut to the general shape of the book page or printed charm. A thin sheet of paper on which the lettering is transcribed with ink, is applied face downwards to the woodblock while the block is wet with paste or size. Later the paper is rubbed off, leaving a clear impression in ink upon the block, an inversion of the original text or drawing. The block is then carved so that the text remains in fairly high relief.

The printers — as observed at Derge in eastern Tibet — work in pairs, one on each side of a big bench. One selects the block and puts it on the bench. The other smears it with ink by means of a felt pad. The first lays the paper upon the block, and the second takes the impression by running a heavy leather roller over it.[4]

4. André Migot, *Tibetan Marches,* translated from the French by Peter Fleming, London, 1955, p. 151.

Images and Paintings

Tibetan Buddhist images, whether plastic or pictorial, serve primarily as aids in the meditations and rituals. Their forms are believed to have been divinely revealed, and the efficacy of the image therefore depends upon the accuracy with which it is rendered. Images are made in the monasteries, either by laymen or monks, but always under the direct supervision of the monks, and in strict accordance with the instructions in the religious manuals, which describe them in minute detail as they have appeared to the great mystics of the faith during the ecstatic trance induced by meditation and yogic practices. These manuals are translated from Indian originals, and the images, unless representing Bön divinities or Tibetan historical figures, are likewise Indian in character. Their graceful semi-nude forms are a constant reminder to us that Buddhist art, like the religion, was transplanted intact from a warm and benign climate and forced to blossom through the centuries in an alien world where social and climatic conditions are of quite another order.

Every detail of the image has meaning. The lotus pedestals on which the figures sit or stand are symbolic of spiritual birth. The hands invariably form *mudras* or hold emblems which express the nature, function or activities of the god. (See pages 13-14, 16).

Solemn rituals attend the making of an image. In order to ensure the success of the pious undertaking, the work is begun and the most significant features executed on auspicious days and hours. Ideally, the artist should meditate until he becomes vividly aware of the divine form. The artist who has this capacity, infuses the image with a spiritual content which transcends mere technical skill. When, as in some of the early work of the Newari craftsmen, great technical skill was added to vivid spiritual awareness, the images possess rare beauty and creative power. However, although these spiritual and aesthetic qualities are appreciated, they are not essential. The correctness of the form with all its attributes is in itself sufficient, for upon this, and this alone, depends the magical potency of the image in the meditations and the rituals.

When the work is completed, an elaborate ceremony of consecration must be performed, which im-

parts life to the image and makes it worthy to serve as the temporary abode of divinity. During this ceremony sacred writings and other charmed materials are sealed within the hollow interiors or the special charm places in the metal images. Some of the giant statues contain complete collections of the canonical works. In the case of pictorial images, such as the *tankas* described below, *mantras* are inscribed upon their backs, and if the images are particularly valued, the hand prints of the officiating lama are also imprinted with saffron-tinted holy water. The *mantra* usually employed is *Om Ah Hum*, written either in Tibetan or in the sacred Indian script called Lantsha, with *Om* opposite the head of the divinity, *Ah* opposite his throat, and *Hum* opposite his heart.

Metal images of copper, bell metal or a brass-like alloy are usually cast by the "lost wax" process. This consists of making a wax model of the image on a clay core. The wax model is finished in detail and then covered with damp clay, except for a few openings. The entire mass is then dried and baked. The wax runs out of the openings and the molten metal is poured in to fill the space left by the wax. The clay mold is broken away and the image extracted, the finishing touches being administered by hand. Arms, heads and emblems are sometimes cast separately and joined to the image by tenons. Emblems are also often separately cast or beaten and inserted into the hands of the figures.

Metal images in relief are usually beaten on a mold. The metal is first hammered to the required thickness, then shaped on a mold of lac. It is then rubbed over with wet clay, leaving a thin layer on the surface. On this the pattern is drawn or scratched and then hammered until the desired relief is obtained.

Whether the image is cast or beaten, the wax or clay mold is destroyed in the process, so that each image has to be modelled anew, and no two images are exactly alike.

The small terra cotta votive tablets called *t'sa t'sa* are cast, on the other hand, from metal molds so they may be endlessly duplicated. When a lama visits a home and has need of an image in his rites of exorcism and purification, he molds a small image, and lets it dry in the sun. The great monasteries mold *t'sa t'sa* from clay mixed with the ashes or pulverized bones of holy men obtained during

cremation, or with sacred grains or earth. The British called these "potted lamas." *T'sa t'sa* are sold to pilgrims as souvenirs, carried in charm boxes, and placed on household altars. Many are sealed within the larger images and within the Buddhist memorial towers called *chortens.*

The most important Tibetan paintings are the *tankas* or hanging scrolls showing the divinities and other sacred subjects. Usually the *tankas* are painted on cotton cloth, very rarely on silk. Some are entirely composed of appliquéd work or embroidery.

The word *tanka (thang-ka),* meaning "something that is rolled up" derives from the fact that *tankas* are mounted with silk borders and wooden rollers like the Chinese hanging scrolls, but it is not recommended that *tankas* be rolled up, for this often causes the paint to chip and crack. Collectors should allow them to hang even when they are being stored.

The *tanka* artist uses the same technique as does the mural painter who covers the walls of Tibetan temples with religious subjects. He uses as a rule a firmly woven cotton cloth imported from India or China, cutting it to the correct size and stretching it in a framework which is upright, never horizontal as is customary in China and Japan. He covers the cloth with a thin layer of chalk and thin glue, smoothed and polished by means of a stone or a shell. His pigments are mainly mineral and earth substances, ground with a mortar and pestle, mixed with the same thin glue, and sometimes with a little chalk. He sits before his easel in a cross-legged position, and before he begins to work, evokes the presence of the god to whom the painting is dedicated.

For laying out the proportions of the gods, the traditional standard of measure is the finger, usually the breadth of the middle finger or the thumb of the artist or the donor. The measure having been determined, the finger is laid out by means of a diagram produced by ruler and compass. However, this labor is often dispensed with altogether, for the great monasteries have had carved woodblocks made for the important traditional subjects. From these blocks *tankas* are printed and sent to the outlying monasteries so that the artist needs only to fill in the colors. Transfer patterns are also printed on paper or cotton cloth, which the artist may place over his canvas, pricking through the contours with a needle, thus producing a dotted outline on the surface beneath. This outline is

roughly traced with a charcoal pencil and later carefully finished with a brush and red or black ink.

Although line is the essential element in the *tankas* the brush strokes do not have a life of their own with subtle nuances and variations in strength and breadth such as we find in Chinese paintings. It is only required that the lines be firm, sure and correct, for on this depends the magical potency of the *tankas.*

Colors also are symbolic. The color of the god's body must always conform to the instructions in the manuals, but judging from the variability of color in the halos and other elements, the artist seems to exert considerable freedom in these matters. The aesthetic satisfaction which we derive from *tankas* is largely due to the harmonious balance of their colors, and to the skill and sensitivity with which the artist applies the colors, often in delicately graded tones.

As has been pointed out by Tucci and Grousset, two of the *tankas'* most able and perceptive critics,[5] many of the better paintings have a natural affinity to the Italian primitives. There is the same naive charm and devotional ecstacy. Even the celestial heavens and choirs of saints are similar, although the artistic language is naturally different. Few can fail to respond, as well, to the power and conviction with which the Tibetan artist represents the terrifying protector divinities.

The Indo-Nepalese style is responsible for the hieratic compositions of the *tankas,* in which a large central figure is surrounded by rows of small figures, and for the basic forms and dress of most of the divinities, with their clear-cut echoes of classical Indian art.

Chinese artistic influences are generally evident in the rendering of such elements as flowers, clouds, rocks, water, and temple roofs. With China's domination of Tibet in the eighteenth century, fresh currents flow from the east and are more fully understood and assimilated. Compositions tend to be less formal, and landscape settings become more frequent. Among the innovations are wonderful palaces and gardens of Chinese inspiration, heavens aglow with celestial light, and clouds

5. Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls,* Roma, 1949, I, pp. 284-286, etc.; René Grousset, Civilizations *of the East,* translated from the French by C. A. Phillips, New York, 1935, IV, pp. 275-299.

in exquisite forms of many hues. There is a new feeling for space. Brushwork becomes finer, and colors — now delicate and now vivid — show subtle graduations of tone. For the first time, the *tankas* reveal that age-old Buddhist delight in nature as the expression of the spirit. Miniature Tibetan scenes may enliven the traditional subjects.

Tankas hang, often in overlapping rows, above the altars and from the pillars and rafters of temples. Murals of similar subjects cover the walls. *Tankas* are used, as we have said, primarily to evoke the gods during the meditations and rituals. They are also carried in procession and employed by the monks for teaching, illustrating the lives of saints and other religious and magical purposes.

Music and Drama

Music, like most other Tibetan arts, traces its origin to India and China, but has developed along uniquely Tibetan lines. It is closely linked with every aspect of life. Occupational songs, simple in time and tune but often remarkably beautiful, ease the burdens of labor. Shepherds everywhere play flutes made of the wing bones of birds. Singing and dancing of a simple kind enliven village life. More ambitious popular music, always with religious significance, is provided by lay dance troupes which offer historical dramas, or rather operas, in which dialogue alternates with song, and the versatile members act, dance, sing and take their turns at the cymbals, drums and stringed instruments. Only in this relatively secular type of music are stringed instruments used, although the Indian lute is depicted as a symbol in Tibetan religious arts. The principal scale, as throughout all Eastern Asia, is the pentatonic.

It is the liturgical music, however, which commands our greatest interest. This music of the temples is vocal and choral with orchestral accompaniment and interludes. The voices of the monks are extraordinarily deep, sonorous and beautiful. The chanting of the scriptures and hymns is reminiscent of plainsong, but differs in its regular metrical basis. The choir sings in unison, but the melody is supported by a choral drone.

The three main components of the orchestra are the rhythm provided by the various drums, bells, and cymbals, or by the drum beat alone; a continuous pedal note or drone held by the long trumpets; and a sustained air played by the oboes in unison, often alternating with the voices. The clashing sonority of the cymbals, the ringing of the bells, the deep booming of the trumpets, the thunder of the big drums, and the rich reedy sound of the oboes, supplemented on occasion by the conch or thigh bone trumpet, combine to give a unique timbre to this temple music.

The long telescopic trumpets are used in pairs, the bell ends usually being held up by two attendant monks, while the two players take turns at blowing to produce a prolonged and awesome drone. These trumpets and the oboes are said to have come from the Iranian world by way of

India. The thigh bone trumpet has been called the only instrument of probable Tibetan origin, but this almost certainly came with Tantric Buddhism from India, along with the small double drum which is often made of two skull caps, and other articles of human bone used in the rituals. As impressive as the music itself, are the sudden silences which seem to symbolize the transition from the world of Becoming to the realm of Being.

As the *mantras* are believed to be connected with the natural sounds of Truth proceeding from the human psyche, so the musical instruments have their counterparts in the natural sounds of the body which the lamas say can be heard when the mind is stilled and the ears closed to external sounds. These sounds are described as a thudding like the big drum, a clashing like cymbals, a soughing sound like a conch, a ringing as of bells, a sharp tapping as of the hand drum, a moaning like the oboe, a bass moaning like the big trumpet, and a shrill sound as of the thigh bone trumpet.[6]

The arts of the drama and dancing also play an important part in worship, and the Tibetans seem to be the only Asiatic peoples who have retained the once universal custom of wearing masks in religious dances.

The colorful dance-dramas held in the monastery courtyards are a form of expression comparable to medieval mystery plays. The participating monks wear robes of brilliant Chinese silks with wide flowing sleeves and skirts. Masks of papier-maché or wood, representing beneficent and malignant spirits, completely cover the head.

The dances are, as has been said, a Bön survival, adapted as a rule to Buddhist themes, although the New Year's drama preserves the Bön tradition of exorcising the evil spirits of the old year and ushering in good luck for the new. Other dramas relate to the history of the Church and the triumph of Buddism over Bön, or the triumph of Tantric Buddhism over Chinese Buddhism, especially Ch'an (Zen), during the famous religious debates held in Tibet in the eighth century. Mahāyāna Hva-shang, the Chinese exponent of Ch'an, who was defeated and expelled from Tibet, is a popular comic character. He appears as a great foolish baby who is taunted by the

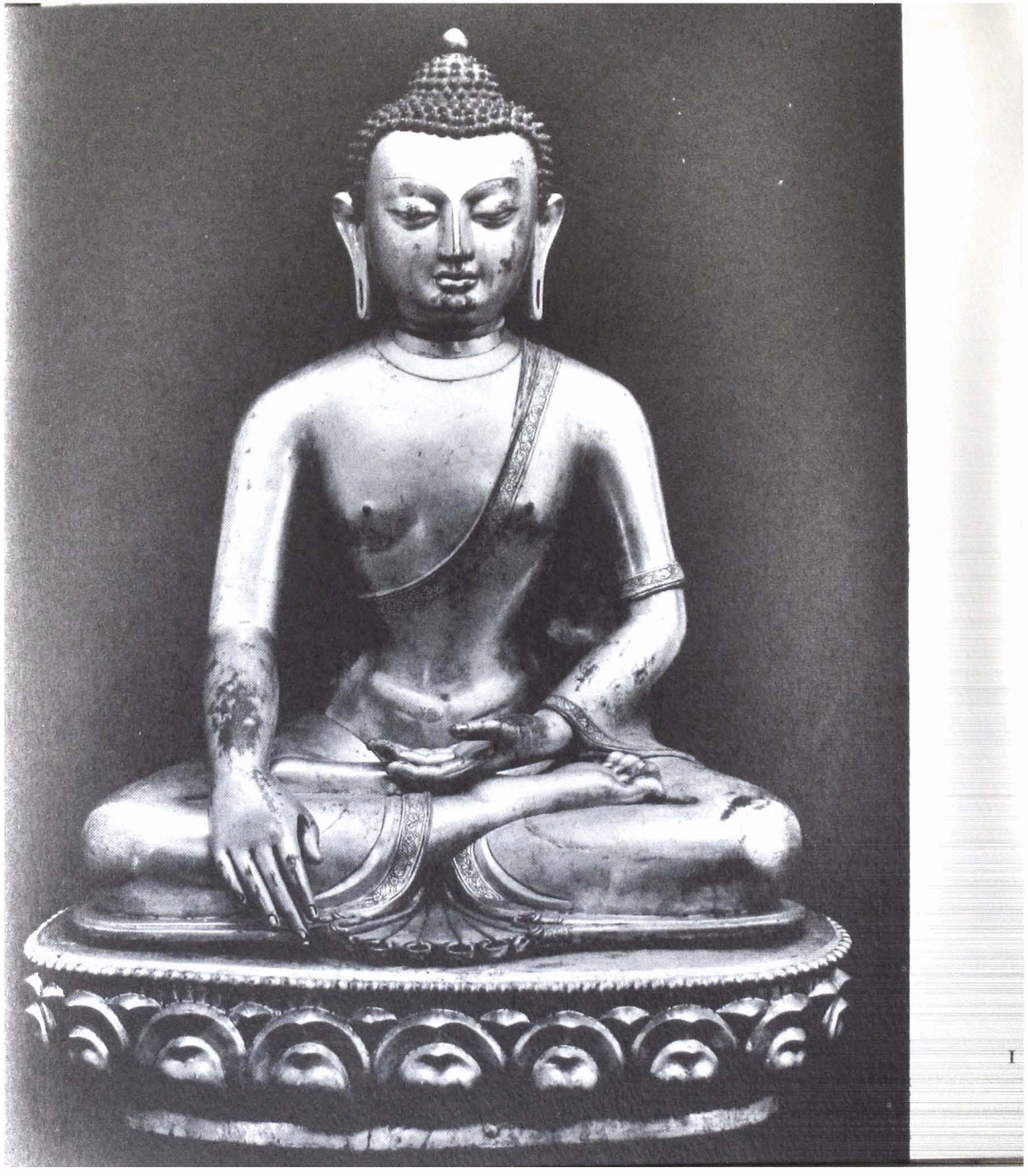
6. Evans-Wentz, *op. cit.*, p. 128, n. 4.

Tibetan monks. There are hundreds of scenes; hundreds of monks take part, and each set of dancers is differently dressed. Some wear aprons of carved human bones and carry small skull drums. They dance to the music of conch, cymbals, bells, trumpets and drums, now with slow precision, posturing and gesticulating, now launching into a sudden whirlwind of rapid movement with everyone leaping high or spinning around on one leg. The complicated and stylized motions are executed with an easy precision denoting long and intensive training.

The plays often continue for several days, and they are the only monastic religious observances to which laymen are invited. The people pitch their tents in the surrounding countryside for the duration of the plays. Wearing their most festive attire, they watch with rapt and silent attention as the scenes unfold.[7]

The least known of Lamaist arts, Tibetan liturgical music and drama are described as powerful aids in man's quest for spiritual realization. Westerners who have been privileged to attend these rituals have been deeply impressed with their aesthetic side, apart from their religious significance. The world will be poorer if they are allowed to pass away.

7. For music and drama see also P. C. Crossley-Holland, "Tibetan Music," *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* London, 1954, VIII, pp. 456-464, *Newark Museum Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection,* Newark, New Jersey, 1950, II, pp. 20-28, 56-57; Migot, *op. cit.* pp. 131, 179-183.



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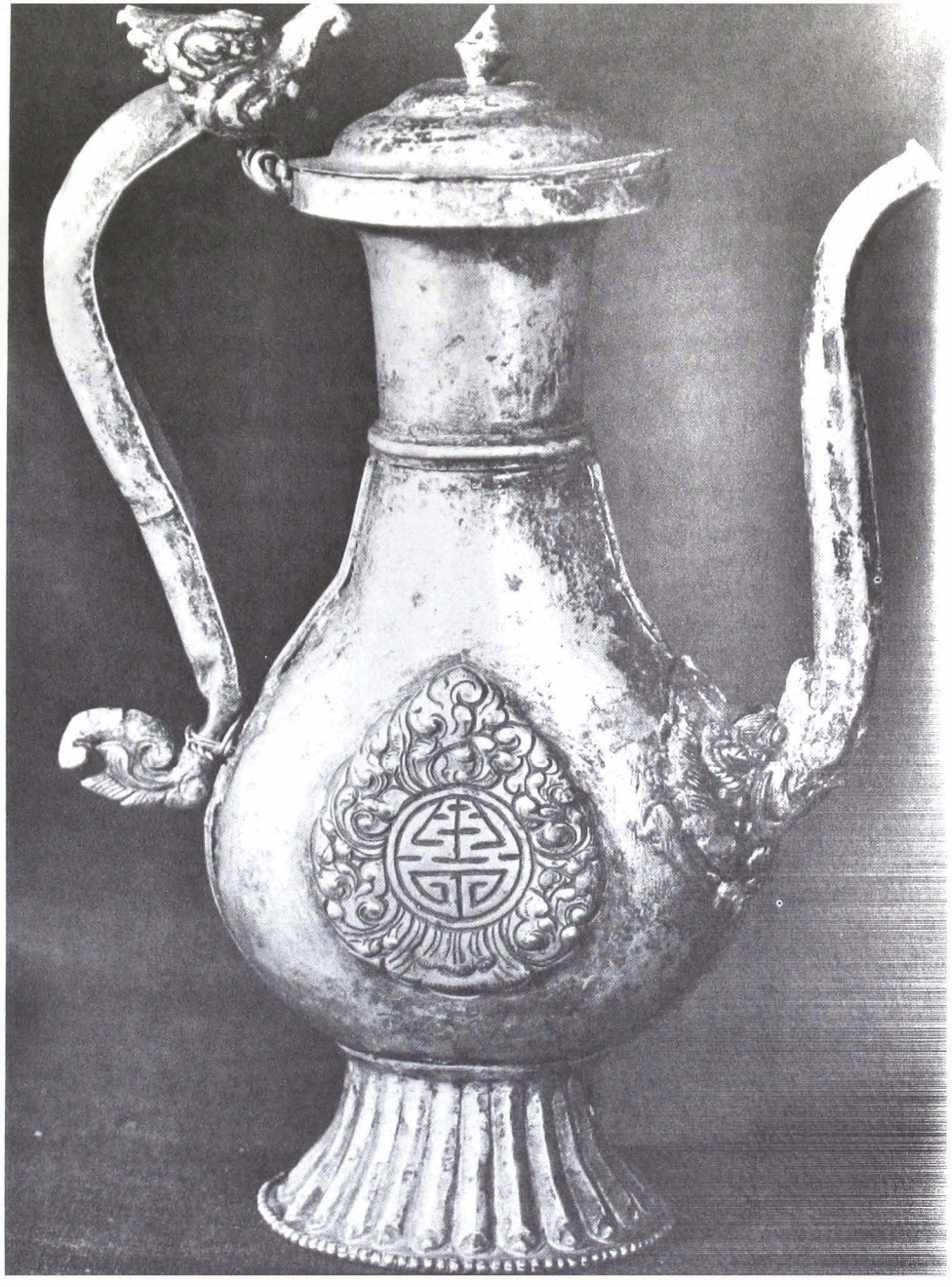

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Cover: Rubbing from Woodblock
Collection: Museum of Anthropology
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

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